

Protective Factors and Resiliency: The Ability to Bounce Back

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Introduction

- **Historical Context:** Post WW2, disease model to positive psychology.
- **Positive psychology** is “the scientific study of optimal human functioning [that] aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive” (Duckworth, Steen & Seligman, 2005).
- **Resiliency** (a conventional case example): Vreni, a 14-year-old Swiss girl who “in the absence of her mother (who was hospitalized with mental illness), raised her siblings, cared for her alcoholic and physically compromised father, and later reported having a happy marriage and contented life” (Alvord & Grados, 2005, p.234).

Central Questions of my thesis research

- What are the characteristics of individuals who manage or cope successfully with stressful and/or traumatic events?
- What can research in psychology tell us about resilience and how to promote it?
- **Hypothesis:** There exists predictive factors of resiliency. Individuals with a grateful and mindful perspective will exhibit higher levels of resiliency.
- **Goal of study:** Examine correlations between groups of people with certain personality traits and levels of resiliency.

Defining Resiliency

- **Varied definitions & issues in definition.** Disagreement as to whether it should be used only to describe a better than expected outcome despite extreme adversity – or whether it can be used to describe a personality style.
- Before the 1980s those who showed good outcomes in the face of adversity (e.g. poverty) were considered special or “**invulnerable**”.
- Today resiliency is seen as a very common human outcome in spite of adversity – most people cope well with stress, resilience is “**ordinary magic**”, “resilience is a basic human adaptive system” (Masten, 2001). So all of us can display resiliency in certain ways and at certain times
- Before the 1980’s resiliency was seen as exceptional today it is seen as one of many individual differences factor and thus something that can be promoted

Protective factors

- **Intrinsic factors** – personality – social competence, problem solving skills, internal locus of control, sense of purpose & future.
- **Extrinsic factors** – family – secure attachment, good parenting, high expectations from parents, order in the household.
- **Extrinsic factors** – outside family – supportive teachers and role models, strong community, rich social network.

Risk Factors

- **Low SES**, stressful family life, parent divorce/ separation, neglect, abuse, **lack of parental support**, authoritarian parenting, disability (mental or physical), wars & natural disasters.
- Risk factors have multiplicative effects.
- Number of risk factors is correlated with child's behavioural problems (Rennie & Dolan, 2010).

Measuring resiliency

- Two major research designs have been used to study resilience in children – ie why some children cope well with adversity while others do not.
- **Variable-focused** = multivariate analysis of risk/protective factors ---- outcomes.
- **Person-focused** = comparing groups of resilient vs. non-resilient ---- what makes them different. ←

Methods

- **Sampling procedure:** Online Survey on AMT (Amazon Mechanical Turk). Created a HIT (an ad).
- **Survey:** Demographics questions, hobbies / activities, traumas, support groups, numerous individual differences scales including resiliency.

Methods

- **Participants (200)**

- 111 males, 87 females, 1 non-binary.
- Ages: distribution 18 to 69 (mean 36 years).
- In terms of education 37% 'some college', 52% 'BA', 11% 'graduate degree'.
- Income: \$12,000 US to \$100,000+ (~75% below \$60,000).
- Ethnicity: 73% White (N. American & European), 13% Asian, 6% African American, 5% Hispanic, 1% Native American, 2% Other.

Methods (Scales)

- Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (26 items) example of items on the resiliency scale : I am able to adapt to change / I know where to turn for help/ I am not easily discouraged by failure
- The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Stewart-Brown, 2012)
- The Gratitude Questionnaire -Six Item Form (McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang, 2001)
- The Toronto mindfulness scale (Lau et al., 2006)
- General Anxiety Disorder Scale (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, Lowe, 2006)

Results

Correlations

		Wellbeing	Mindfulness	Gratefulness	Anxiety	Resiliency	Life Satisfaction	Perfectionism
Wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	1	.428	.577	-.704	.792	.692	-.119
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.113
	N = 199							
Mindfulness	Pearson Correlation		1	.316	-.081	.470	.348	.155
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.256	.000	.000	.038
	N = 199							
Gratefulness	Pearson Correlation			1	-.355	.612	.576	-.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000	.000	.695
	N = 199							
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation				1	-.456	-.417	.182
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.000	.000	.015
	N = 199							
Resiliency	Pearson Correlation					1	.600	.135
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.000	.071
	N = 199							
Life Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation						1	-.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)							.637
	N = 179							

Results

- **Religious** affiliation: we found a positively associated with resiliency. Participants were asked if they had a religious affiliation or not this was a binary yes no question
- **Bicultural** affiliation: trend toward higher resiliency, and lower anxiety, sample size is limited to be further analyzed.
- **Positive support** person since age 3: trend toward higher levels of mindfulness, and higher resiliency.
- **Income**: no correlation with resiliency, or predictors of resiliency.

Discussion thus far

- **Summary** - Resiliency does seem to be associated with well-being, gratitude and mindfulness, and negatively associated with anxiety. Further analysis will examine subsets of these measures for more specific relationships.
- **Limitations** - Limited sample. Would prefer to have a more diversified sample.
- **Implications** - Military, education, workplace.

Future Directions

- Intervention study to further study the affect of gratefulness on resiliency.
- What is the relationship between well-being and resiliency (High correlation).

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